

Message Text

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21

ACTION EA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4390

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3915

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SCUL, PINT, KS, US

SUBJ: RETURN OF GREGORY HENDERSON COLLECTION DEMANDED

1. JUNE 18 PRESS AND MEDIA HAVE GIVEN PROMINENT COVERAGE TO PUBLIC REQUEST BY KOREAN CULTURAL RELICS PROTECTION ASSOCIATION THAT FORMER EMBASSY CULTURAL ATTACHE GREGORY HENDERSON RETURN 143 KOREAN ARTIFACTS, SOME OF NATIONAL TREASURE QUALITY, WHICH ASSOCIATION ALLEGES HENDERSON ILLEGALLY REMOVED FROM KOREA.

2. PRESIDENT OF ASSOCIATION, LEE SUN-KUN, REPORTEDLY SAID IN PRESS INTERVIEW THAT HENDERSON RELICS ARE WORTH MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED MILLION WON (US \$250,000). INCLUDED IN HENDERSON COLLECTION ARE PARTICULARLY VALUABLE CDLADON VASE OF THE 12TH CENTURY AND A WHITE CERAMIC POT "BAEKJA DAEHO." ACCORDING TO LEE, ASSOCIATION HAS CONFIRMED HENDERSON'S POSSESSION OF RELICS THROUGH PICTORIAL BOOKLET (KOREAN CERAMICS) THAT HE PUBLISHED.

3. LEE ALSO STATED THAT HIS ASSOCIATION, WHICH REPORTEDLY IS PRIVATELY SPONSORED, WILL UNDERTAKE MAJOR DRIVE IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT TO RETRIEVE CULTURAL PROPERTIES WIDELY SCATTERED ABROAD. COUNTLESS CULTURAL PROPERTIES HE SAID HAD BEEN SMUGGLED OUT DURING KOREAN WAR AND SUBSEQUENT PERIOD OF CONFUSION.

4. LEE TOLD PRESS HE HAS SENT LETTER TO EMBASSY AND TO THE DEPARTMENT. IN FACT, HE REQUESTED APPOINTMENT LATE JUNE 18 AND
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WILL SEE DCM JUNE 19.

5. COMMENT: LEE, WHO IS FORMER PRESIDENT OF YEONGNAN UNIVERSITY IN TAEGU, IS CLOSE TO BLUE HOUSE, AND WE BELIEVE HIS ANNOUNCEMENT HAS GOVERNMENT SUPPORT. IT SEEMS PRETTY CLEAR THAT ACCUSATION IS EFFORT TO RETALIATE FOR HENDERSON'S ATTACKS ON ROKG IN NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST LETTERS TO THE EDITORS COLUMNS.

6. DCM WILL LISTEN TO WHAT LEE HAS TO SAY AND EMBASSY WILL MAKE NO PUBLIC COMMENT.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S VIEWS OF LEGAL ASPECTS OF THIS SITUATION, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF RECENT TREATY ON PROTECTION OF CULTURAL PROPERTIES.

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